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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an online publishing site at Georgia Perimeter College called "The Story Project." The Web site contains more than 60 stories written by faculty members, students, administrators, staff, family, and friends, and serves to encourage student writing, create a community of writers, celebrate common and diverse past experiences, preserve the past, and encourage leisure reading. The stories range from school-related experiences to childhood adventures, travel stories to romantic recounts, sports stories, and immigration experiences. There are also military and civil rights categories, and the college hopes to expand and add more current history categories. Advantages of the Project include exposure to the past through real-life accounts and the educational opportunities inherent in having students publish their work. The College benefits from the stories by identifying potential subjects for articles in one of the College's publications, by celebrating the school's common and diverse experiences and heritage, through an opportunity to involve alumni and friends, and by bringing the College together for a unified goal and experience. The paper contains several excerpts from stories published in Georgia Perimeter College's "The Story Project." (CB)

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1

The Story Project: An Online Site for Reading and Sharing
http://www.gpc.edu/~heritage/storypagehtm

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On October 29, 2001, at Georgia Perimeter College, we launched an online publishing site called **The Story Project.** After a year of publishing, we have sixty-six articles and eight pictures in eighteen categories and we receive submissions nearly every week. The articles are written by faculty members, students, administrators, staff, family and friends. At the beginning of October, 2002, we added a counter to the main page of the site, and we were astounded to discover that The Story Project had over 800 hits in thirty days.

How many times have you heard someone say, "Remember the time when…"? Those are the stories we want to save and share in The Story Project. Saving our past through written or oral history is important and GPC wants to use modern technology to enhance that process. From that desire, we created The Story Project, an online collection of stories. The site serves to encourage student writing, create a community of writers, celebrate our common and diverse past experiences, preserve our past and encourage leisure reading.

The stories range from school related to childhood adventures, travel to romantic, or sports to immigration. We also have a military category and a civil rights category and we hope to expand and add more current history categories.

Advantages of the project include exposure to the past through real-life accounts to the educational opportunities for students to publish their work at no cost. The college benefits from the stories by identifying potential subjects for articles in one of the college's publications, enjoying our common and diverse experiences and heritage, a chance to involve alumni and college friends, and bringing the college together for a unified goal and experience. We want this project to bring members of our extended college community together as we celebrate the written word as an interesting and enjoyable means of communication.

Here are a few excerpts from stories to whet your appetite and give you an idea of the types and variety of stories published in The Story Project.

From "The Trip"

In order to make it through the horrendous smoke, Grandpa could only travel at 15 miles per hour while leaning out the open door of his 1937 Chevy coupe so he could see the white center line. At the same time, all the children in the back seat were

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coughing and crying while Grandma, in the front, was swearing she would never ride in a car with such a hard head again.

From "The Beaten Corpse"

Matt Murphy was well known for having a weakness for gambling, particularly poker...He constantly owed people money and never held a job long enough to catch up on all of his debts. When he passed on, he was laid out in the local pub where family and friends could pay their last respects. There used to be an old Irish tradition at wakes whereby callers would show their affection or disdain for the deceased by either kissing them or hitting them. The story goes that the line of angry visitors ran out the door and continued all the way to the end of the block.

From "Popsicle"

"What are you doing here? You're not allowed." I was so scared I ran out as fast as a cheetah. The next day I went back to the store and walked in again. This time I got as far as the Popsicle section. Jake caught me and told me to get out again. I went back to my grandma's place and said, "Why won't he let me get a Popsicle?" Grandma said, "Because he is prejudiced."

From "Earl"

We had a Dutch boy with us whom the Germans had brought to France to work and certainly I would not like to be any German he got his hands on. He was a smart kid too as he spoke 5 languages with English among them. He has blown for home now and the Captain gave him a captured German staff car to go in.

The idea for an online place to publish and read stories about "the time when" began to grow several years ago. A colleague of mine was slated to give a presentation at a conference on Technology and Oral Tradition. The colleague became ill and asked me to fill in but didn't tell me he had not gotten any further on his research than the title. As soon as I began to think about Technology and Oral Tradition, it was obvious to me that we now have cameras, video cameras, internet, email, scanners, tape recorders and many others pieces of equipment to aid us in preserving stories from the past. I also immediately realized that a huge sin of omission by most of us is that we rarely use these resources to capture and preserve the past.

About a year ago I was asked if I had any ideas for a special project that could involve more than one discipline and more than one area of our college. I suggested an online site where we would solicit, publish and read stories from our pasts. My idea was accepted and so, armed with no funding, no organization and one wonderful technical volunteer, we developed the site for The Story Project.

We quickly learned that one of the greatest advantages of online publishing is that you can change your organization and layout immediately, many times and with time as the only cost. Finally, we narrowed our focus largely to narrative stories of a particular time or event in our past or the past of our families. We thought of these as the stories we

had heard from "the grownups" as we sat around the kitchen table or on the porch. We decided to create a main page and from there have categories for dividing the stories and encouraging topics. We have topics such as Birth and Death, Nature Stories, Animal Stories, and Travel Stories. We continue to add categories, such as the newest called Remembering Those We Loved which accommodates stories that cover more of a person's life than one incident. We continue to revise and rename categories. For example, we just changed Immigration Stories to Stories from Far Away.

So we now had a name for the project and categories. We needed a submission form, a disclaimer stating we had complete editorial control over what would be published, and a URL. We checked with the school lawyer to make sure our disclaimer was legal. We checked with Academic Computing to make sure our site fit the college guidelines. Next we received a place on the school server, and then we got a web address and a password. We were ready to go to work. So far, we had still spent no money and really had no expenses.

We launched the site without much publicity. Working on the theory that we would start slowly and figure out what we were doing as we went along, we sent out a few electronic messages to the college community. We began to beg good story tellers to submit favorite stories we had already heard. We thought that if we carefully solicited submissions from some good writers in the college community, we would have a better chance of getting future submissions of the same high quality and of the desired topics. That seemed to work well.

The advantages of The Story Project to students have been many. Students see that their writing is important and is valued. Because essays must often be rewritten before submitted, the students learn the value of revision. Students can read submissions by other students, enjoy them and gain inspiration from them.

All members of the college community can come together through the project. Submissions come from all areas of the college from administrators to students, even students in learning support classes. All submissions are placed together under the same categories. We can come together through the stories, across the usual barriers of rank. The story from an Academic Dean who writes in "Boots" about a trip wire wound around his boot in Viet Nam is given the same stature as a student's story "Color Blind" about a black woman and a teenaged white girl going to a government office to get emergency assistance. Besides enjoying our common bounds, we can also celebrate our uniqueness through the stories. The diverse heritage of the members of our college is reflected in the stories. Stories come from white and black, men and women, rich and poor, city folk and country people. We have a series of letters from a soldier in World War II and we have a couple of articles from a family living in Germany at that same time. We have stories that take place in North America, Africa and Europe. We have stories that took place recently and stories from years ago.

We have also encouraged the submission of letters, pictures and other documents. So far, we have letters from a young soldier in World War II who was a radio operator

with Patton's tanks. His letters, his picture, his gravesite, and the letter from the army chaplain to his mother are all published on The Story Project. We have a picture of the Maine taken by a plant worker's great uncle when the uncle was serving in the Spanish-American War. We have pictures of Cordia Coleman and three generations of her descendents along with a story of her life in the Appalachian Mountains. No one has yet submitted any video or audio, but we expect to add both soon.

The project is not just beneficial to students in writing classes. We currently have history professors who are working on projects with students to collect and publish documents and narratives from recent history. Two projects that are being developed are on the Civil Rights Movement and another on Viet Nam. As the participants in these historical events are growing old and passing away, we are hoping our Story Project will help preserve memories and documents of those important and fascinating times.

Another advantage of the Story Project to the college has been the wonderful publicity. The Story Project has been written up in the school paper and a community paper, and has been publicized at several community meetings and, of course, scholarly conventions. The school's Foundation plans to mail out over 4,000 brochures about the project in January as part of a "soft" fundraiser for the college. Alumni and retired faculty will receive a letter and the brochure and will be asked to submit articles. We are hoping some of these stories will fit the category of Georgia Perimeter College stories. We want to have one category devoted to college stories and we plan to include pictures there as well.

Recently we developed a brochure about the Story Project. The brochure which is a tri-fold mailer gives the URL, describes the purpose of the project, tells how to submit articles, and gives excepts from a few of the stories. This brochure will also be used to gain publicity for the project and for the college. It is, in addition, going to be used in a mailing to alumni and retired professors.

We accept submissions by regular mail and by email. The submissions can be typed as Word documents, in html or rtf. We accept scanned pictures and documents or we will scan and return the originals. We do require a permission to publish form with the submission and we also ask for the person's affiliation—faculty, student, friend, etc.—with the college. We do reserve the right to refuse and to edit submissions. We have refused very few and we have returned a very few with requests for revisions.

We think the smartest thing we did in launching the project was to move slowly and to solicit some excellent articles to serve as examples. We believe that once we "baited the field" with submissions of interest and high quality, that readers rose to that level. Occasionally we wish for more and more articles, especially in some categories, but we remind ourselves that quality is far more important than quantity.

Our requirements have been few. We used Macromedia Dreamweaver to create the web pages. We placed the project on the college's server and set up the managing account as if it were a faculty web page. Right now, we have one faculty member who

handles the submissions and one dedicated technology person who volunteers to post submissions and manage the site.

The core idea described here is an online publishing site managed by faculty. Let your own creativity and needs decide how such a site could be valuable to you. You might want to use it to showcase student projects from business or computer courses. Student speeches could be recorded and placed on the site. History projects or sociology projects would easily lend themselves to an online publishing project.

Log on to our Story Project at www.gpc.edu~heritage/storypage.htm

Enjoy the stories and think about how your school could benefit from a similar project.

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